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LETTER

TO THE MOST REVEREND THE
LORD ARCHBISHOP
OF
CANTERBURY,
ON THE
PRESENT OPPOSITION
TO ANY FURTHER
REFORMATION.

L O N D O N :

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L E T T E R, &c.

MY LORD,

YOUR seat at the head of the Church of England necessarily places you in a character to which many look up for the maintenance and security of their religious liberties.—And you must, in justice, be considered as answerable, not only for your personal opposition to the good work of reformation, whether that opposition be, open or covert, positive or negative,—but answerable also for the effect of your influence.

In all debates, the most certain way to come at just conclusions, is to have recourse to original principles ; and I need not inform *you*, that the principles of the Protestant Reformation rest on these two foundations,—the all-sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures, as the rule of our faith here, and the means of our salvation hereafter ;—and the right of private judgment, which each individual claims in the interpretation of them. These are the only true and consistent principles of our Protest against the enormous and antichristian claims of the Church of Rome.

However, it is to be lamented that we early, I may say, even in the moment of reformation, departed from these very principles, which will alone justify our departure from the Romish Church.—Not that I would be understood to reflect on those eminent and excellent characters to whom we owe so much.—If we consider the force of prejudice, and the temper of the times, we shall have rather to wonder that they went so far, than to expect that they

they should have gone farther. But *Luther*, it may be reasonably supposed, would, e'er this our day, have renounced his Consubstantiation as a Scripture doctrine;—and *Calvin* would have been convinced that he ought to have spared *Servetus*; and both would have receded from every deviation from the general principles on which they set out. They would practically have acknowledged the supreme authority of the Scriptures, though such acknowledgment should have been fatal to a favourite system:—and they would firmly have rejected all injunctions to implicit faith in human explications.

Now, my Lord, though these premises shall be conceded, and a Protestant cannot deny them;—how is your Church, as a Christian and a Protestant Society, to be justified in the continuance of impositions more than unauthorised by the Founder of our Faith, and inconsistent with your own avowed principles?—Or in the continuance of a formulary of religious worship, which, though in many respects truly excellent,
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yet in several parts, and those not unimportant, generally acknowledged to be faulty?—Or further, how are the superiors of the Ministry in this Society to be justified, when they expressly deny that liberty in the important concerns of religion and conscience to their fellow Christians, which they have, with so much justice, arrogated to themselves against the Church of Rome.

In regard to the proposed Subscription to the truth of the Scriptures only, it must be first observed, that much art has been used to misrepresent the principles on which such proposal was grounded; much ill-bestowed pains have been taken to prove its *inexpediency* in respect to some opinions, which certain Doctors have pronounced *Fundamentals*, and thence we have heard much of the danger of such *innovation* even to the Christian cause, as well as in respect to other opinions which might affect civil government.

If these objections have any force,—that force must rest upon the presumption, that
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certain nameless *human* systems favour more of God's immutable truth than his own infallible word ;—that the doctrines of the Church of England have so little concern with the doctrines of Christ, that the establishment of the paramount authority of his Gospel can be considered as nothing short of an *innovation* ;—that human authority and power is necessary to the assistance and support of the divine word.

The authority of the civil magistrate is bounded by the civil demeanor of the subject.—The thoughts of the heart being known only to God, the magistrate has no concern with the consciences of his people.—'Till these break out into overt acts, he is not only incompetent to the cognizance of them, because he knoweth not the spring, but because they affect not his province.

In this idea, the clerical petitioners set forth their readiness to give any security to Government, that should be judged expedient, in order effectually to secure their obedience to the civil authority of their country,

country, in return for their protection : For, as the contract is mutual, the obligations and duties resulting from it are so too. They further proposed to be more explicit, and offered to give any testimony of their abhorrence of the maxims of Popery, thinking them incompatible, in every degree, with the safety of a free and a Protestant Government. But with their religious opinions, merely as such, they had no other concern than to take heed to ground their Protest against them, on a conviction of their contrariety to the Scriptures, and to maintain their dissent upon principles consistent with themselves : Remembering that when they renounce the dominion assumed by one body of Christians, because they are *men*, that they assume not the most distant claim to it over the faith of others.

The written word of God is unchangeable : And, in proportion to the lights of the age, and the capacity and improved knowledge of individuals, will it be rightly understood.

understood.—Difference in opinion is unavoidable while we are men, nor can any degree of criminality be charged on the most absurd tenet, provided it be not taken up without thought or consideration, or upon trust.—For men must think as they can, since they cannot think as they would;—therefore, however mistaken some men may be in following their own understanding, it is a mistake attended with impunity. But that instant that the Church imposeth, and the *dutiful son* wrappeth up his talent, in confidence that all is right, and maketh her a judge and ruler over the operations of his mind, in that moment he plungeth into guilt. By professing to believe with the Church, because she hath so decreed,—though the Church may *happen* to profess a right faith, yet that individual thereby fatally renounceth the authority of Christ as his sole Lord and Master; he renounceth the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and exerciseth not that reason and judgment which God hath given him, for the direction of all things that concern him.

The argument of peace has frequently been echoed by the petulant and overbearing advocates for the present establishment,—but peace, my Lord, with all its charms, may be bought too dear. This argument suits well with the avowed principles of the Papist, but from the mouth of one who calls himself a Protestant it is most incongruous.—Had this argument been successfully urged against Christ and his Apostles, or more lately against the Reformers,—we must have now lived in the barbarism of Heathens, or the idolatry of Papists.—But I will further observe, that an over-zealous tenaciousness of the present system of faith and formularies of worship, is not that road which leadeth to peace, or can ensure it.

An outward appearance may indeed, for a while, be secured in the doctrines, as well as the rites and ceremonies of any Church, by the criminal credulity of some of its members, and by the implicit obedience of others; and more particularly,

particularly, while the terrors of confiscations and imprisonments are held over the heads of defaulters. But the mind of man will be active, and the conscience sooner or later will be stirring. In some instances, the weight of the burden will rouse to action; and the deeper the conviction is grounded, the more resolute the conduct. And it is but the inflexibility of a few, that is wanting to remove the load, however great, or however secured by the arm of man.—Nor can I discern how that body can then be said to enjoy peace, when the members which constitute it know not that peace which alone is worth having, the peace of God.—And here, my Lord, all the boasted effect of your establishments endeth in a dream. For that peace, which passeth all understanding, may be endangered, may even be lost, by obedience to those very injunctions, which, under the delusion of authority, professed to consider the soul's health, and were followed in trust of their making good such their pretensions.—So that men are drawn into

the sin of hypocrisy *in sacris*, and may live and die within the pale of the Church.—And on the contrary, they may hereafter live in the triumphant Church of Christ, though they should be cast out hence, though they should be reproached, suspended, deprived, imprisoned. So much for the argument of peace, and all comfort from the authority of the Church.

And now, in respect to the right of private judgment, I cannot see how your Grace, as a Protestant Bishop, can admit the principle and deny the practice. It is the more mortifying, to know what is my right, and to be denied the enjoyment of it, than to have been kept in ignorance. So here the Papist has the advantage, not only on the score of consistency, but of happiness.—For how I can be said to be left to the free enjoyment of my own judgment, when I exercise it at the probable expence of my bread, and of my usefulness to society, I cannot discern.—If inclined to engage
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in the ministry of Christ, and to preach the unfearchable riches of his kingdom, as the most acceptable service to Almighty God,—I am bound by the strong cords of an established system, and these strengthened by the most grievous punishments. If I satisfy myself with hearing the Word preached, whither am I to fly for religious improvement, and not behold my teacher encompassed with forfeitures and imprisonments, and must even find myself to live under many civil disabilities.—Thus, *because* I am a Christian, and believe the Scriptures to contain a revelation of the mind and will of God, I am not therefore allowed to serve my country in any office of honourable trust:—*because* I am a Christian, I am not to hear the word of God, which is the rule of my faith, and the guide of my life, preached to me, but by one who, if he dares to tell me the whole truth, is liable to removal and correction. And though I may be fully persuaded, in my own mind, that Jesus is the Christ, and that he is risen from
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the dead : — in one word, *because* I am a Christian, and would profess my faith in Christ *alone*, and though I would, further solemnly engage to teach the people committed to my charge out of the Holy Scriptures, according to the best of my understanding, and diligently to employ myself in the study of the same, I am prohibited from preaching the great truths of Christ crucified.— To be plain :—I am not allowed to enter on the character of a Minister of Christ, without a contradictory engagement to a particular systematical establishment, founded on the authority of the Magistrate, and which is supported, in fact, only because it is established, though it had its origin in dark and ignorant ages.—*Pudet hæc opprobria, &c.*—This, my Lord, is a pitiable and a distressful case, in a country which justly boasts of many advantages over the rest of Europe; but it is a true one, in the most minute and circumstantial parts of it.

After thus much said on the present state of our establishment, it comes to be

be noted, what efforts have lately been made to secure the protection of the laws on the Gospel of Christ, though hitherto indeed without success, in the way of relief.—But these efforts have not been without good effect:—They have been a trial of spirits, in which many hearts have been revealed; they have spread far and wide a knowledge of the nature of the kingdom of Christ; they have produced in the Laity of these nations a satisfactory and general information of *their* concern in the establishment of the word of God, as the sole test of the soundness and orthodoxy of their Ministers faith.—A spirit of enquiry has by these means been raised, and is now gone forth, throughout our land, into the nature and extent of our religious rights, both as Christians and Protestants; and a corresponding conviction is spreading among the people.

Your discouragement, amounting to nothing short of a prohibition, seems, in the end, to hasten the doing away
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of these things, which it was your policy to protract. The protestant principles of the petitioning Clergy were soon declared to be totally inadmissible, and in this sentiment you have inflexibly persevered, without any variation.—They have, however, very wisely made their appeal to Parliament, without concerning themselves, or sending embassies to *Lambeth*.—Parliament is the jurisdiction competent to their cause, and however a previous application to the Bishops might, with some, have argued a more respectful demeanor towards them, such an application might, by the more judicious observer, have been considered as an insult.—The question proposed consists not of abstract theological speculations, but is plain, simple, and uncompounded. And as property is annexed to the present received system, in opposition to the sole authority of Christ, as a Law-giver in his own kingdom, their suit was, with peculiar propriety, made to the Commons House of Parliament. The debates in consequence
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of the several applications which have been made to that House, within the course of a few late years, are lasting demonstrations that, as Christians and Protestants, the Representative Body of this country had not to learn their rule of faith, or the original and only defensible principles of their Protest.

The repeated applications of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers, on the principles of the petitioning Clergy, for an enlargement of their toleration, next demand your further consideration.— However some well-meaning political heads may conceive of distinctions, the causes of both parties have one common principle; insomuch, that all that can be said in favour of a toleration, and which will not hold good in favour of general and equal liberty, is but the shadow of an argument. These applications, after having twice passed through the House of Commons, with almost their unanimous vote, have been rendered abortive by the *indirect* means of yourself and brethren.

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It is further understood that you, my Lord, instead of repenting of your past conduct, join in the deistical sentiment of one of your late workmen,—*that Subscription to the Scriptures is absolutely nothing*. However strange it may seem for an *Archdeacon* in a Protestant Reformed Church to hold this language, I must be excused in supposing that even your Grace, an *Archbishop* and Metropolitan of the same Church, maintaineth this doctrine; for, if report saith true, and it has been whispered in my ear by one not very likely to be misinformed, you even very lately, when some of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers waited upon you, if not to desire your support, yet to beg a cessation of hostilities against their most reasonable request,—you gave them for answer,—“ that you
 “ could not befriend them, unless they
 “ gave some test of their faith besides
 “ subscribing to Holy Scriptures, and
 “ which would shew their belief of the
 “ Divinity of the Founder of our Faith.”
 —This, indeed, had been *noised* in the
 House

House of Lords by the Bishop of *Llandaff*, to the no small astonishment of his friends; and from the subsequent arguing of this business, on more mature deliberation, it seems your Grace has received no benefit.—To an impartial, candid, and liberal-minded man, it should seem as if the Divinity of Christ was *not* revealed in the Holy Scriptures, since the Head of the Church is unwilling to trust a body of his Christian brethren with their Bibles only, and leave them to find it there.—This, my Lord, was saying more against the Divinity of Christ, than was ever before, however unguardedly, dropped from an English Archbishop; insomuch that, had I not considered the matter before with some attention, and had been inclined to have been influenced by great names, I should have determined *against* the doctrine, upon the authority of the Most Reverend the Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury*.

The remaining plan of reformation, which failed for want of your protection

and countenance, was the proposal made by the Deputation from the Meeting at *Tennison's Library*. — This being *immediately* submitted to you, was stifled by you in its birth, and therefore only productive of disappointment to its patrons, and an additional and conclusive proof of your fixed resolution to DO NOTHING.

The objects of this Meeting were, an alteration of the Formularies of Subscription, and a review of the Liturgy. Hitherto, it had been given out that you were inclined to *do something*; but no sooner did a body of respectable men ask that *very something*, which it had been signified was thought desirable by you, and would meet with your encouragement, than you put a contemptuous negative on the *proposal*, and peremptorily declared that you would not move your foot. — These unbecoming subterfuges may indeed serve a present purpose on an emergency, but they evidently demonstrate that the Petitioners were even *politically* right, in not throwing themselves at your feet.

feet.—And further, this declaration, and your subsequent conduct, have contributed to give perpetuity to a Society which you possibly might have destroyed by fair promises, when your stratagems had failed ;—but, knowing now how far you are to be trusted in the Work of Reformation, you have left them to subsist as a Society, which, being at unity with itself, will be a land-mark to the people, until Christianity shall be established in these kingdoms.

So entirely averse have you, my Lord, declared yourself to all reformation, that you have done all that in you lay, to prevent the least degree of it in future. You are said to have forbidden access to the Library at *Lambeth* to a certain Dignitary of the Church of ———, who only humbly requested admission, in order to examine what materials it might furnish towards a judicious and rational review of our Liturgy. Happily, my Lord, there had been an invaluable present made to a public Repository, which,
joined

joined to such hints as may be gathered from several printed Reformed Liturgies, will afford a fund of amendments, proportioned to the demands of Scripture and Reason. Your Grace's refusal will therefore turn upon yourself, without any prejudice to the cause of Reformation.—So uniformly unsuccessful have been all your designs, which have been intended as measures hostile to God's truth.

When your Grace was raised to the throne of your predecessor, the Protestant cause, in the morning of its day, looked up to you for support, and thought to have found you its patron and protector.—You, my Lord, had never apostatized from your principles, or assumed the inquisitor,—you was considered as a moderate Church-man, for many years after your advancement to the Mitre;—and I well remember, the best interest of the Church was thought to have been a gainer, in the substitution of a *Cornwallis* in the place of a *Secker*.—I have only to wish that these prophecies had been fulfilled,

filled, and that your moderation had continued to have been made known unto all men.

With respect for your station and character, and for every virtue you may possess,—but in an entire disapprobation of your politico-ecclesiastico principles, so abhorrent to the interest of the Church of Christ,—I am, in true Christian charity,

My LORD,

March 12th, 1774.

Your Graces's

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